



# **AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF HYPERSONIC INLETS IN FREE-MOLECULE FLOW**

**Max Kinslow and M. R. Busby**

**ARO, Inc.**

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## FOREWORD

The research reported herein was conducted at the Arnold Engineering Development Center (AEDC), Air Force Systems Command (AFSC), Arnold Air Force Station, Tennessee, under Program Element 65802F.

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This technical report has been reviewed and is approved.

ROBERT O. DIETZ  
Director of Technology

## ABSTRACT

This is a report of an analytical study of free-molecule, hyper-velocity air inlet configurations which might be used to supply gas for ion engines aboard satellites. The basic equations for the inlet are developed based upon gas-surface interactions. These equations are numerically solved for various gas-surface interaction parameters. Based upon these inlets, ion rocket performance is determined for various efficiencies.

## CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
ABSTRACT . . . . .	iii
I. INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
II. THEORETICAL ANALYSIS . . . . .	1
III. CONCLUDING REMARKS . . . . .	6
REFERENCES . . . . .	7

APPENDIX  
ILLUSTRATIONSFigure

1. Spatial Distribution of a High-Energy Argon Molecular Beam Reflected from a Silver Surface . . . . .	11
2. Coordinate System and Inlet Geometry . . . . .	12
3. Optimized Hypersonic Inlet Shapes for Various Values of $z$ . . . . .	13
4. Thrust Coefficient versus Ion Rocket Efficiency . . . . .	20
5. Variation of Thrust Coefficient with $z$ for various Ion Rocket Efficiencies . . . . .	21

## SECTION I INTRODUCTION

This report presents an analytical study of free-molecule hyper-velocity molecular inlets for use in conjunction with an ion rocket aboard an artificial satellite. For altitudes above approximately 150 km, where the mean free path is greater than 40 m, the flow may be considered free-molecule for satellites with a characteristic dimension on the order of a few meters. Taking into consideration the effects of the interaction between an atmospheric molecule and the inlet surface, an analytic expression is obtained for the optimum inlet shape.

## SECTION II THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

The optimum inlet shape for maximum molecule collection would be one which would "focus" the molecules to a point. In a monodirectional free-molecular flow field, the optimum geometrical form of a perfectly (i. e., specular) inlet is a paraboloid, since all molecules upon reflection are directed toward the focus. However, in reality there are no specular surfaces, and thus the angle of reflection of an incident molecule depends upon the physics of the gas-surface interaction. An example of the interaction of an argon molecular beam whose incident energy is typical of orbital flight (12 eV) and a silver surface is shown in Fig. 1, Appendix I (Ref. 1). The spatial distribution is quite lobular and supraspecular. For high-speed ratios,  $S_w$  (e. g., if the vehicle has a typical velocity of 8 km/sec and surface temperature of 300°K, then  $S_w \approx 20$ ), the relation between the local zenith angles of the incident molecular flux,  $\theta_i$ , and that of the maximum reflected molecular flux,  $\theta_m$ , is given by Ref. 2, as follows:

$$\theta_m = \tan^{-1} \left[ \frac{\sqrt{1 - \alpha_t}}{\sqrt{1 - \alpha_n}} \tan \theta_i \right] \quad , \quad S_w \gg 1 \quad (1)$$

where  $\alpha_t$  and  $\alpha_n$  = tangential and normal energy accommodation coefficients. Using Fig. 2, the following geometrical relations may be derived:

$$\tan \theta_i = dx/dr \quad (2)$$

$$\tan [\theta_i + \theta_m - (\pi/2)] = \frac{x}{r} \quad (3)$$

and

$$\tan [\theta_i + \theta_m - (\pi/2)] = \frac{\tan \theta_i - \cot \theta_m}{1 + \tan \theta_i \cot \theta_m} = \frac{x}{r}$$

From Eq. (1),

$$\tan \theta_m = z \tan \theta_i, \text{ where } z = \frac{\sqrt{1-a_t}}{\sqrt{1-a_n}}$$

or

$$\cot \theta_m = \frac{1}{z \tan \theta_i}$$

Thus

$$\frac{\tan \theta_i - \frac{1}{z \tan \theta_i}}{1 + 1/z} = \frac{x}{r}$$

or

$$z \tan^2 \theta_i - 1 = (1+z) \frac{x}{r} \tan \theta_i$$

Substituting  $\tan \theta_i = \frac{dx}{dr}$  yields

$$z \left( \frac{dx}{dr} \right)^2 - (1+z) \frac{x}{r} \frac{dr}{dx} - 1 = 0$$

or

$$\left( \frac{dr}{dx} \right)^2 + (1+z) \frac{x}{r} \frac{dr}{dx} - z = 0 \quad (4)$$

Equation 4 is a first-order, second-degree differential equation which can be solved analytically by placing the equation in parametric form. The solution of an equation of this form, i. e.,

$$r(r')^2 + axr' - br = 0$$



is given by

$$x^{-2(a+b)} = \text{const } t^{2a} (t^2 + b)^{-2(a+b)} (t^2 + a + b)^{a+2b}$$

$$(t^2 + b)r = -axt$$

For the case at hand,  $a = 1 + z$ ,  $b = -z$ , and  $a + b = 1$ .

Thus, substituting, the solution to Eq. (4) becomes

$$x^{-2} = \text{const } t^{2(1+z)} (t^2 - z)^{-2} (t^2 + 1)^{1-z}$$

$$(t^2 - z)r = -(1+z)xt$$

Now, at  $x = 0$ ,  $r = r_0$ , and thus the constant may be evaluated as

$$\text{const} = r_0^{-2} z^{-2} (z+1)^{z-1} (1+z)^2$$

Rearranging terms, one arrives at the parametric solution to Eq. (4),

$$x = \frac{z - t^2}{z + 1} \frac{r}{t}$$

$$\frac{r}{r_0} = \left( \frac{z + 1}{t^2 + 1} \right)^{\frac{1-z}{2}} \frac{z^{z/2}}{t^z}$$

For the case of  $z = 1$  (i. e., a specular surface), the equations reduce to the following forms:

$$x = \frac{1}{2} (1 - t^2) \frac{r}{t}$$

and

$$\frac{r}{r_0} = \frac{1}{t}$$

Then

$$\frac{x}{r_0} = \frac{1}{2} \left[ \left( \frac{r}{r_0} \right)^2 - 1 \right]$$

which is simply the equation of a paraboloid symmetrical about the  $x$ -axis.

The parametric equations were numerically solved with the inlet shapes for various  $z$ 's presented in Fig. 3. Notice that for a fixed value of  $x$ , the area,  $\pi r^2$ , increases as  $z$  increases. Thus, the inlet would be a more efficient molecule collector if it were constructed from a material with a large  $z$ -value for atmospheric gases. It has been shown in Ref. 2, based upon the theory of reciprocity of gas-surface interaction, that  $z$  can be a function only of the surface material and the incident gas and not of incident velocity or direction. Typical values of  $z$  determined from a theoretical analysis (Ref. 2) using experimental data are 1.23 for argon reflected from silver (Ref. 3) and 1.71 for platinum reflecting argon (Ref. 4).

These numerical results for the inlet shape will now be applied to the calculation of ion rocket performance. The net thrust,  $\mathcal{F}$ , of the vehicle may be estimated for various ion engine efficiencies and inlet shapes by considering the momentum equation,

$$\mathcal{F} = (M_2 V_2) - (M_1 V_1)$$

where  $V_1$  is the entrance velocity, typically 8 km/sec ( $2.6 \times 10^4$  fps),  $V_2$  is the exit ion velocity,  $M_1$  is the mass entering inlet, and  $M_2$  is the accelerated exiting mass. The momentum of the exiting unaccelerated particles is neglected. The ion engine efficiency,  $\eta$ , will be defined as that fraction of captured gas that is ionized and accelerated to velocity  $V_2$ , i. e.,

$$\eta = \frac{M_2}{M_1}$$

Therefore, the expression for the thrust becomes

$$\mathcal{F} = M_1(\eta V_2 - V_1) = \rho_1 A_1 V_1(\eta V_2 - V_1)$$

where  $\rho_1$  is the ambient density and  $A_1$  is the inlet entrance area. Thus, a thrust coefficient may be defined as

$$C_{T,A_1} = \frac{\mathcal{F}}{\rho_1 A_1 V_1^2} = \left( \eta \frac{V_2}{V_1} - 1 \right) \quad (5)$$

The variation of  $C_{T, A_1}$  with  $\eta$  is presented in Fig. 4 for  $V_2 = 120$  km/sec ( $4.2 \times 10^5$  fps). Also, one may define a thrust coefficient based on  $A_o$ , the inlet exit area, as follows:

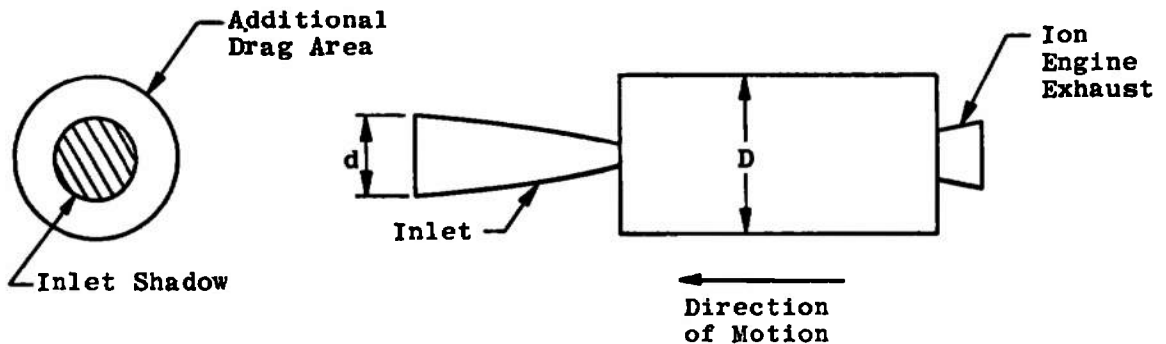
$$C_{T, A_o} = \frac{\mathcal{T}}{\rho_1 A_o V_1^2} = \left(\frac{r_1}{r_o}\right)^2 \left(\eta \frac{V_2}{V_1} - 1\right)$$

where  $r_1$  is the inlet entrance radius and  $r_o$  is the inlet exit radius. Figure 5 presents the variation of  $C_{T, A_o}$  with  $z$  for various efficiencies,  $\eta$ , at an  $x/r_o$  value of 3.0 for the same values of  $V_2$  and  $V_1$  as given above, with  $r_1/r_o$  being determined from Fig. 3.

The fundamental purpose of an ion engine on an orbiting vehicle is to overcome atmospheric drag and provide orbit control. In order to offset drag of the inlet, it is necessary that the net thrust be zero, and from Eq. (5) it can be seen that this condition is achieved for  $\eta = 6.7$  percent for the values of  $V_1$  and  $V_2$  previously assumed.

If the total drag of a satellite is caused by components other than the inlet, then a higher ion engine efficiency is required. In order to illustrate the results for the case of a satellite with drag other than inlet drag, the following simple example will be considered.

Assume a satellite configuration as shown below:



Let  $\Delta D$  be the drag in excess of the inlet drag. The expression for  $\Delta D$  is

$$\Delta D = \pi(D^2 - d^2)\rho_1 V_1^2 C_D/8 \quad (6)$$

where  $C_D$  is the drag coefficient of the satellite minus the inlet.

For the ion engine to overcome the atmospheric drag of the satellite, it is necessary that

$$\mathcal{F} = \Delta D \quad (7)$$

From Eq. (5) and the definition of  $A_1$  it can be seen that

$$\mathcal{F} = C_{T,A_1} \rho_1 V_1^2 \pi d^2 / 4 \quad (8)$$

Substituting Eqs. (8) and (6) into Eq. (7) yields

$$(D^2 - d^2) C_D = 2 C_{T,A_1}$$

Notice that the effect of the static density and orbital velocity has vanished. Using an estimated value for  $C_D$  of 2.11 and solving for  $D/d$  gives

$$D/d = \sqrt{0.946 C_{T,A_1} + 1} \quad (9)$$

Thus for the previously stated values of  $V_1$  and  $V_2$  and using Fig. 4, Eq. (9) becomes

$$D/d = 3.77\sqrt{\eta} \quad (10)$$

Now, if the ion rocket engine efficiency is assumed to be approximately 30 percent ( $\eta = 0.3$ ), then Eq. (10) yields  $D/d = 2.06$  for zero net force on the satellite.

### SECTION III CONCLUDING REMARKS

In conclusion it can be stated that, based upon Fig. 3, a material that has a larger value of  $\sqrt{1 - \alpha_t} / \sqrt{1 - \alpha_\eta}$  when reflecting atmospheric gases (i. e., with high normal and low tangential accommodation) permits shorter inlets for the same inlet area. A shorter inlet is advantageous for several reasons. First, it requires less material and therefore less weight for its construction. Second, the flight path of molecules between the encounter with the inlet surface and entering

into the ion engine is shorter, which will permit operations at lower altitudes before intermolecular scattering decreases efficiency. Third, a shorter inlet will increase the solid angle subtended by the inlet exit as seen from a point on the inlet surface and thus decrease "spillage" from the ion engine inlet due to the finite size of the scattering lobe (see (Fig. 1)).

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## **APPENDIX ILLUSTRATIONS**

Incident Beam,  
12.0 eV Argon

○ Ref. 1

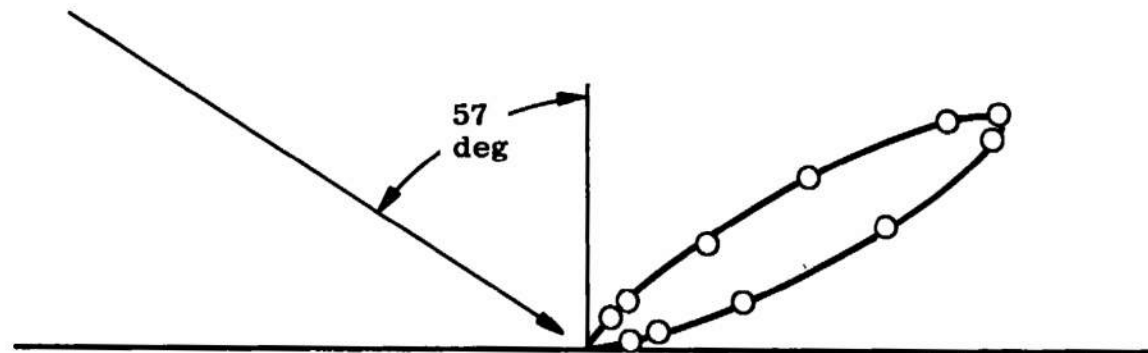


Fig. 1 Spatial Distribution of a High-Energy Argon Molecular Beam  
Reflected from a Silver Surface

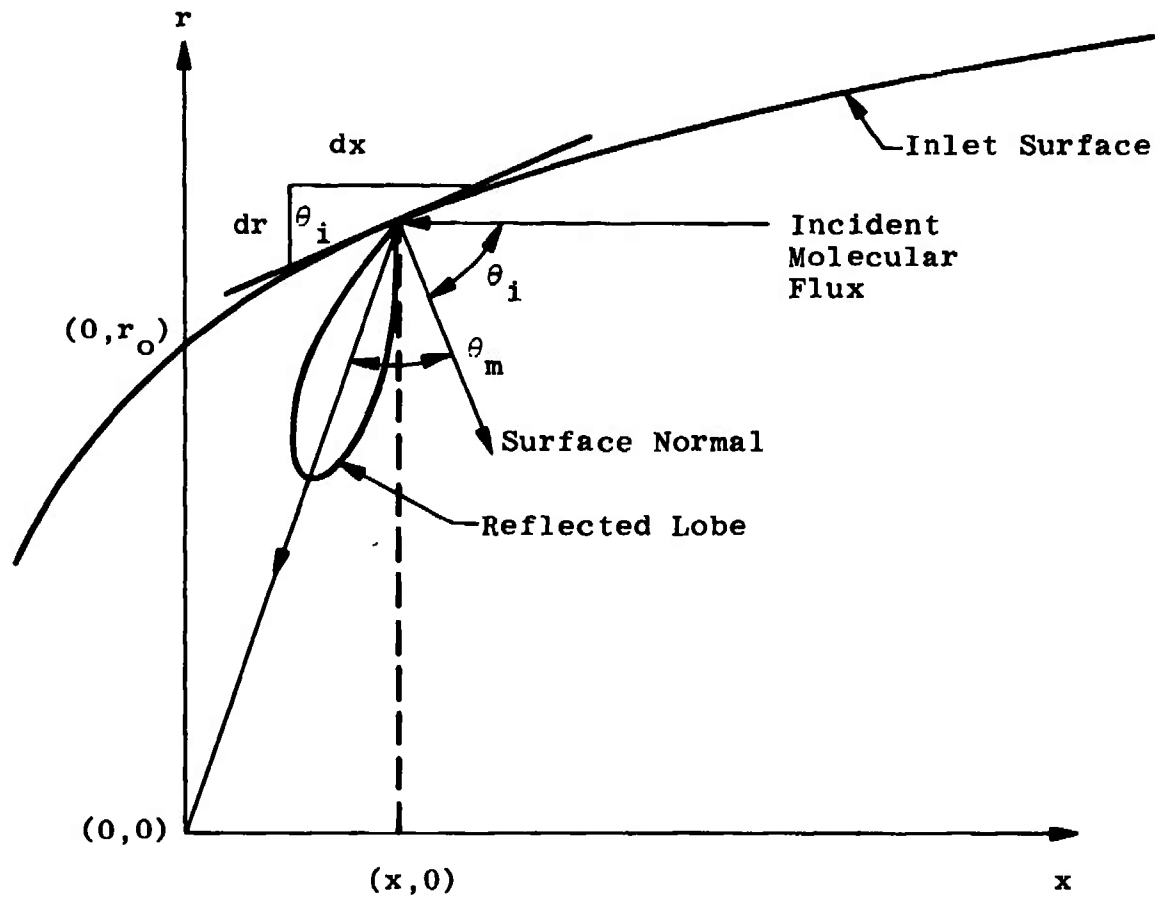
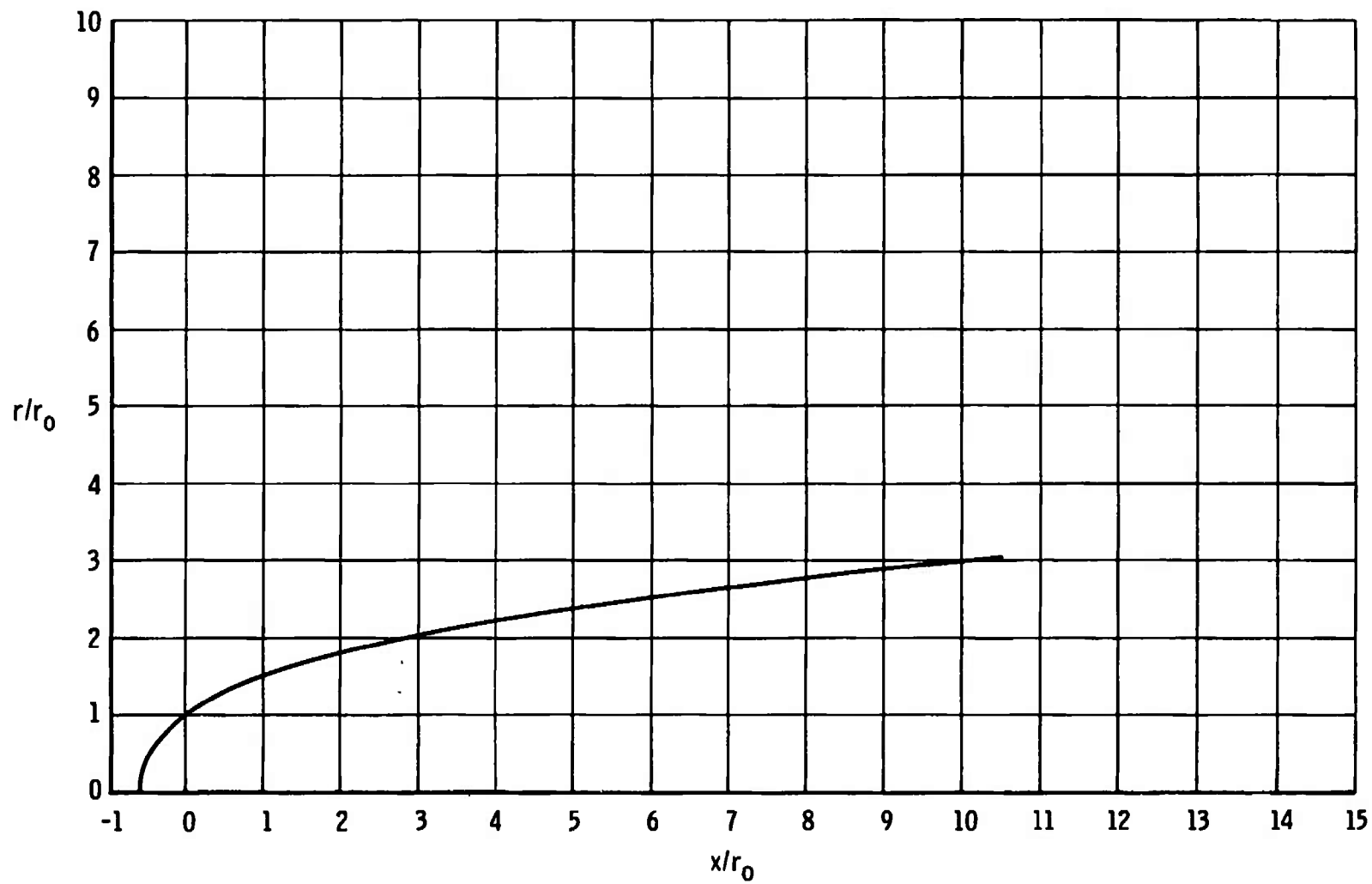


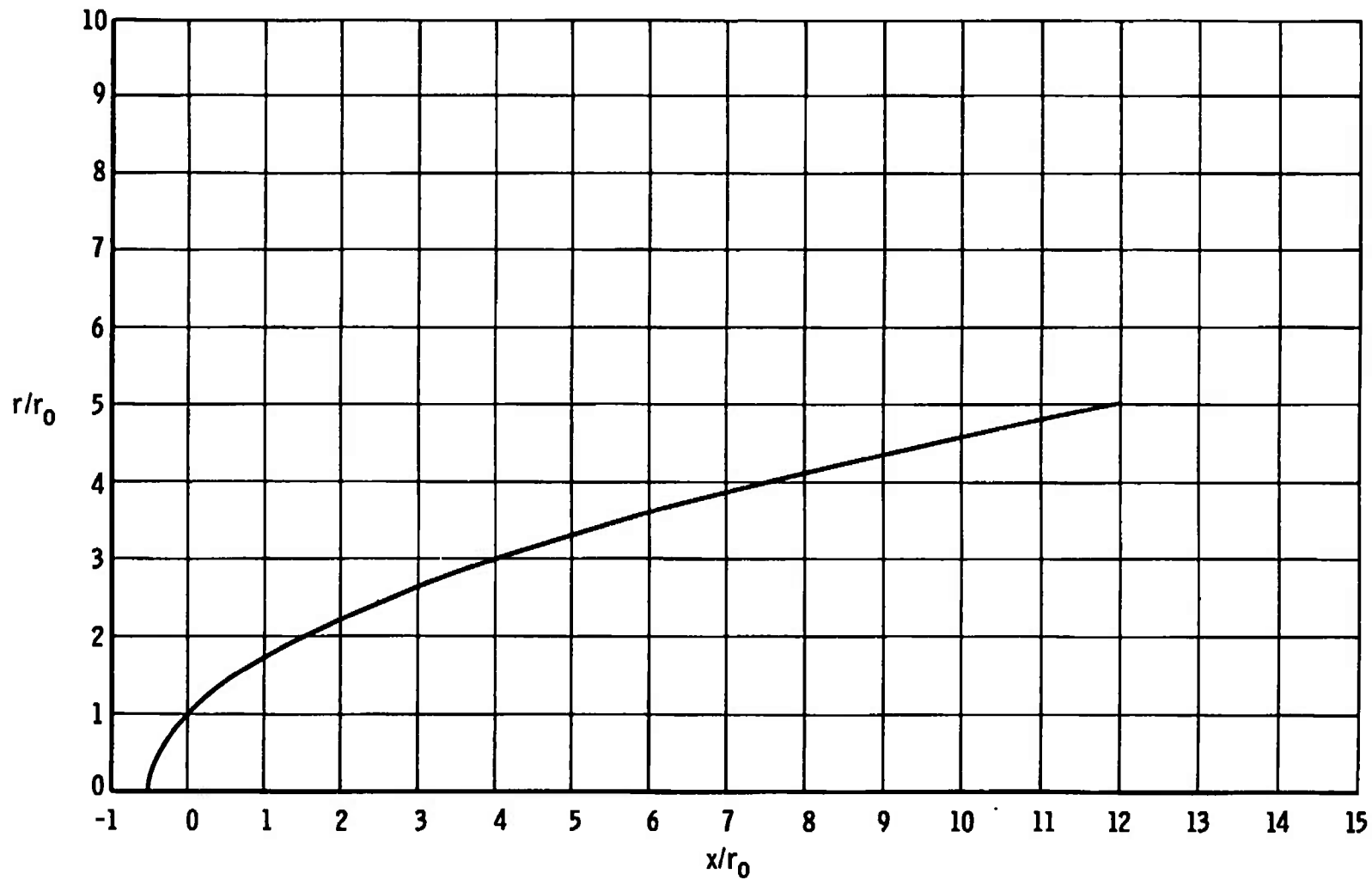
Fig. 2 Coordinate System and Inlet Geometry



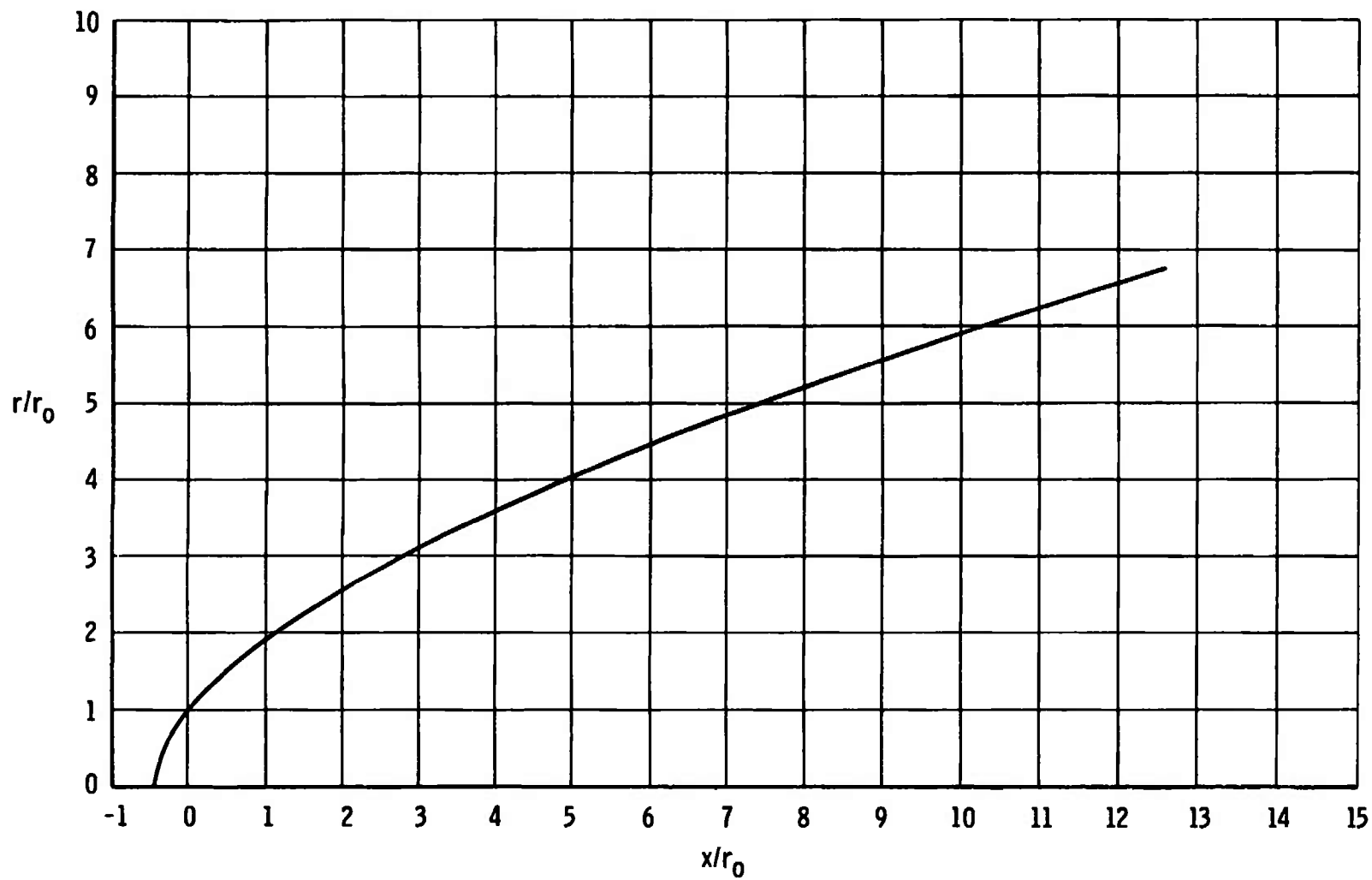


a.  $z = 0.50$

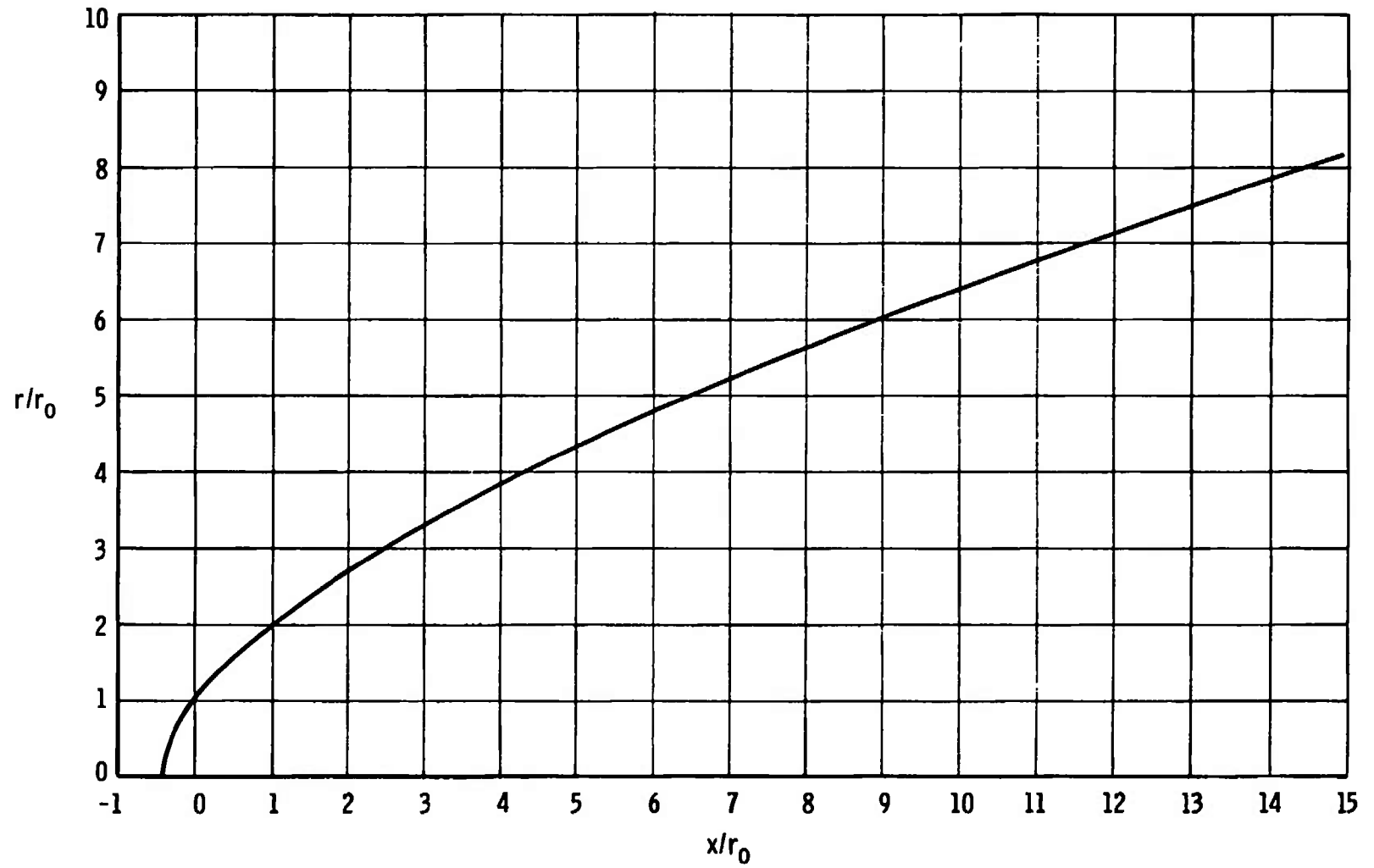
Fig. 3 Optimized Hypersonic Inlet Shapes for Various Values of  $z$



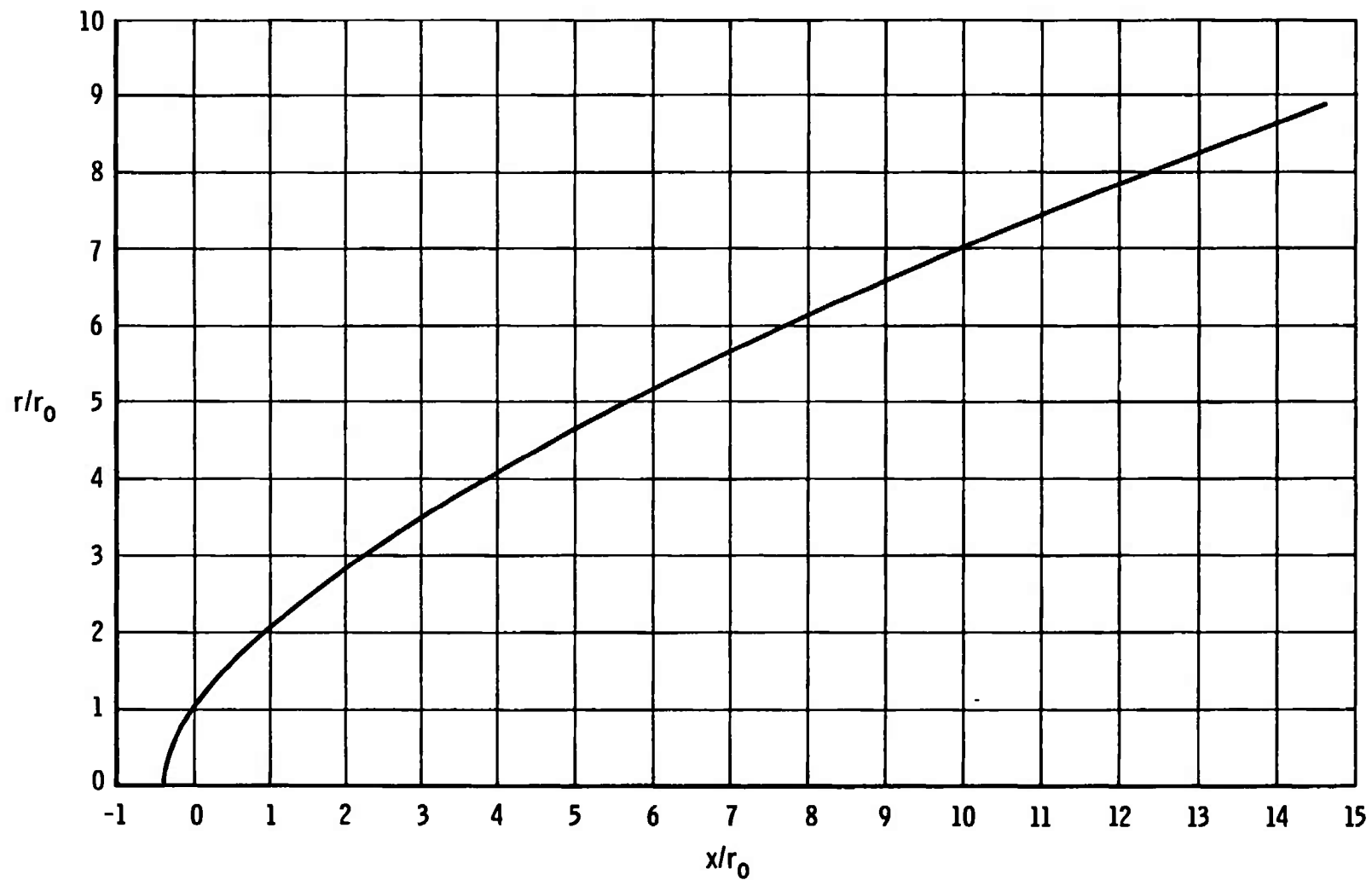
b.  $z = 1.00$   
Fig. 3 Continued



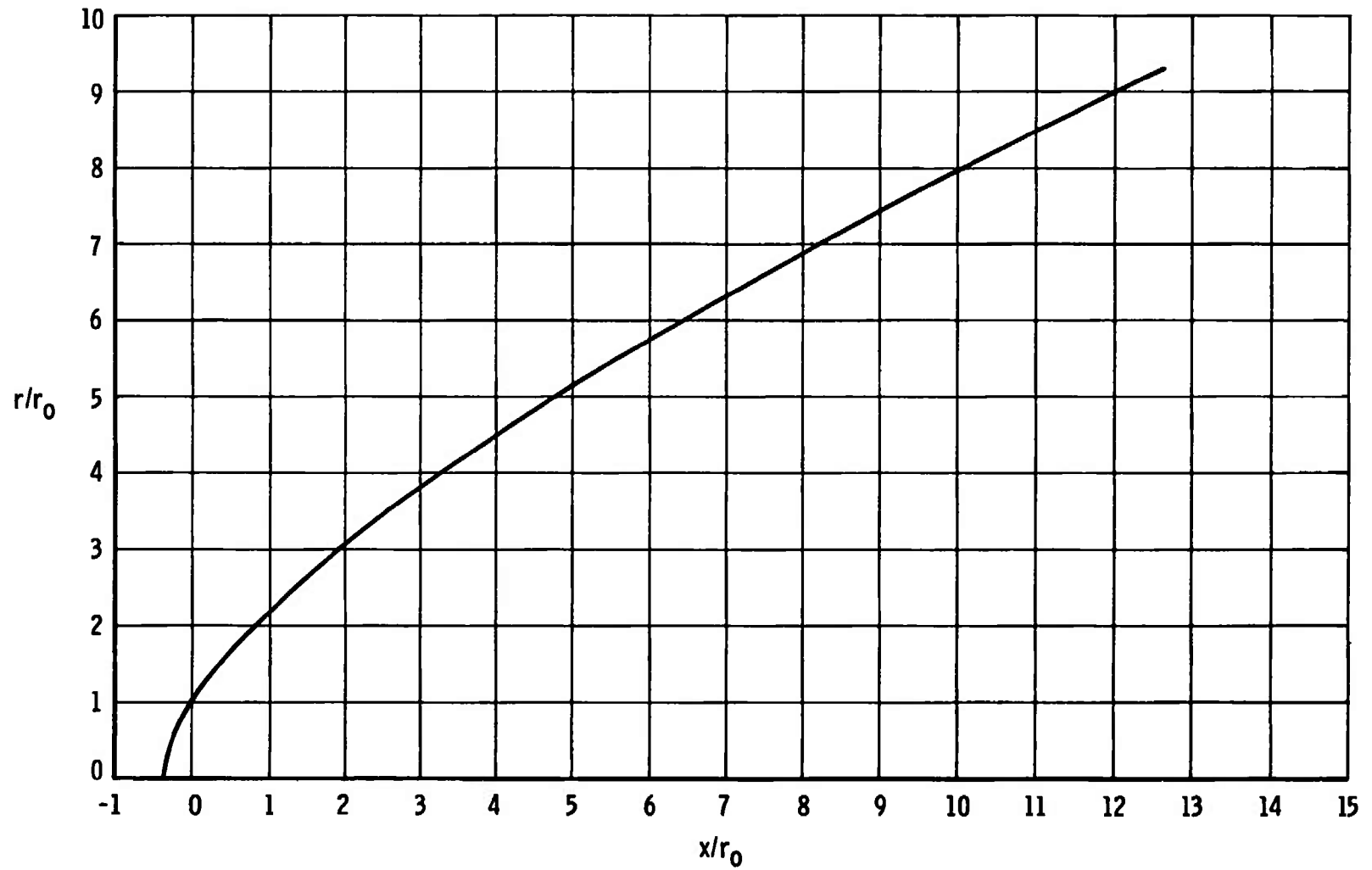
c.  $z = 1.50$   
 Fig. 3 Continued



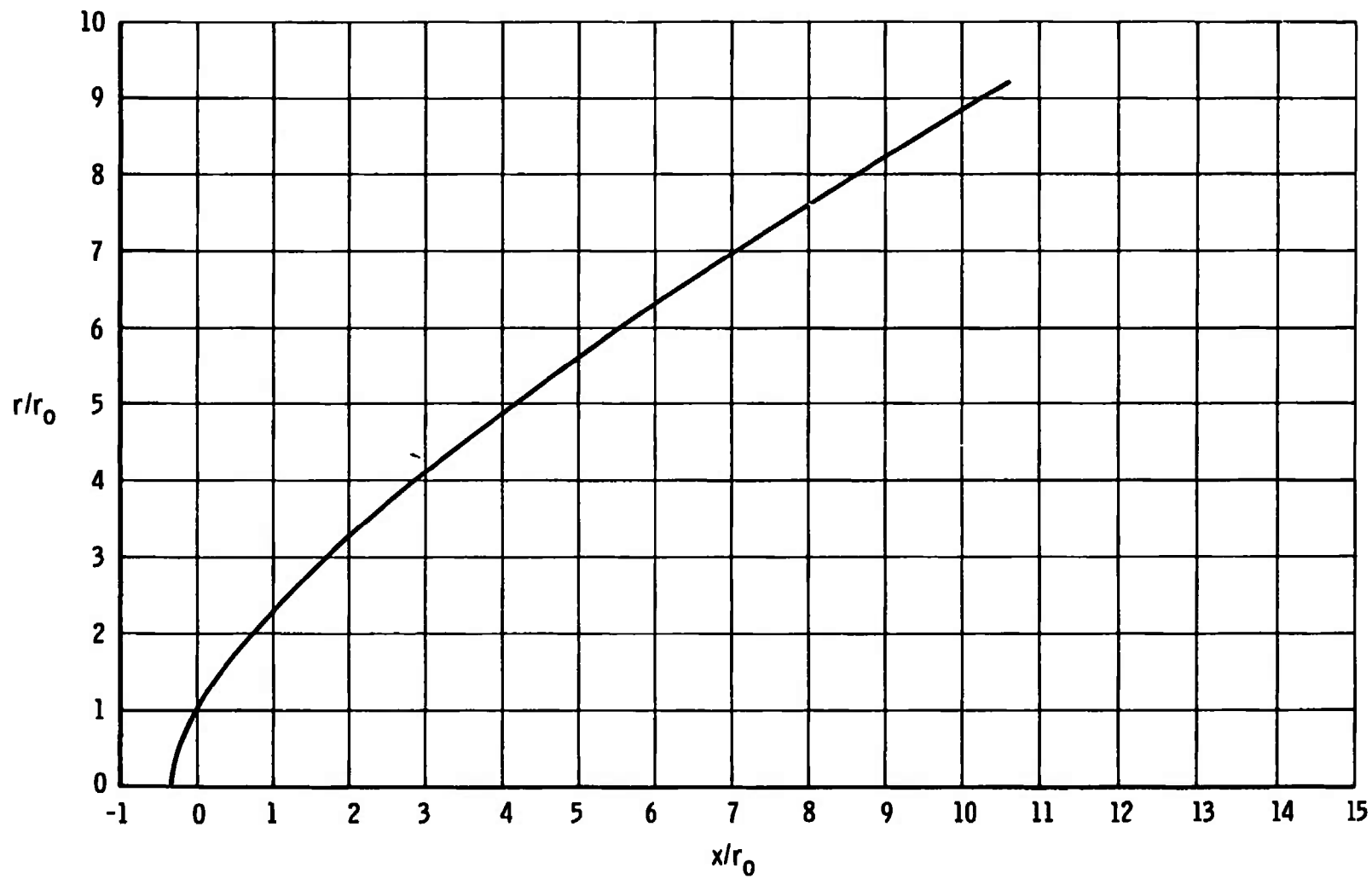
d.  $z = 1.71$   
Fig. 3 Continued



e.  $z = 2.00$   
Fig. 3 Continued



f.  $z = 2.50$   
Fig. 3 Continued



g.  $z = 3.00$   
Fig. 3 Concluded

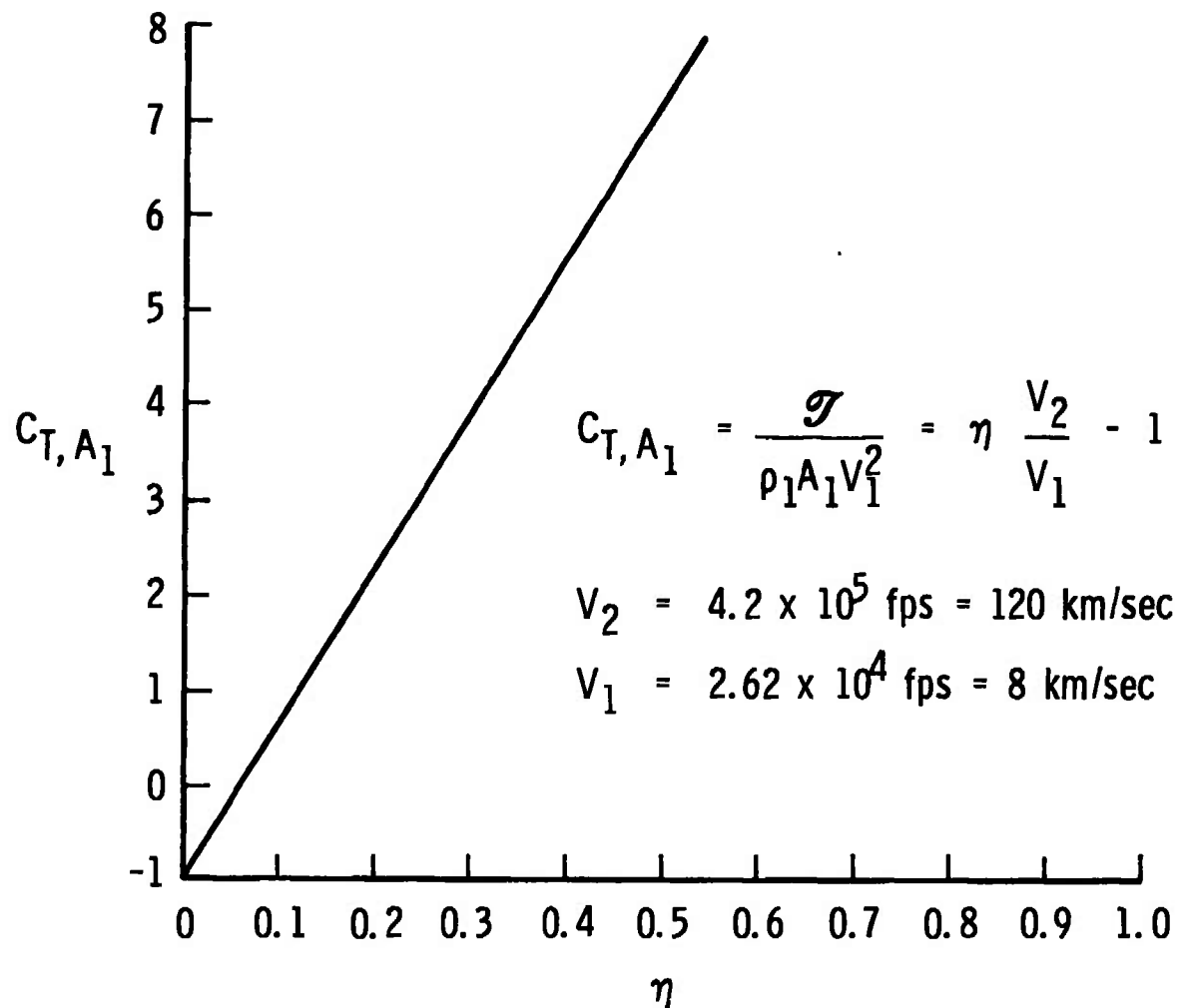


Fig. 4 Thrust Coefficient versus Ion Rocket Efficiency



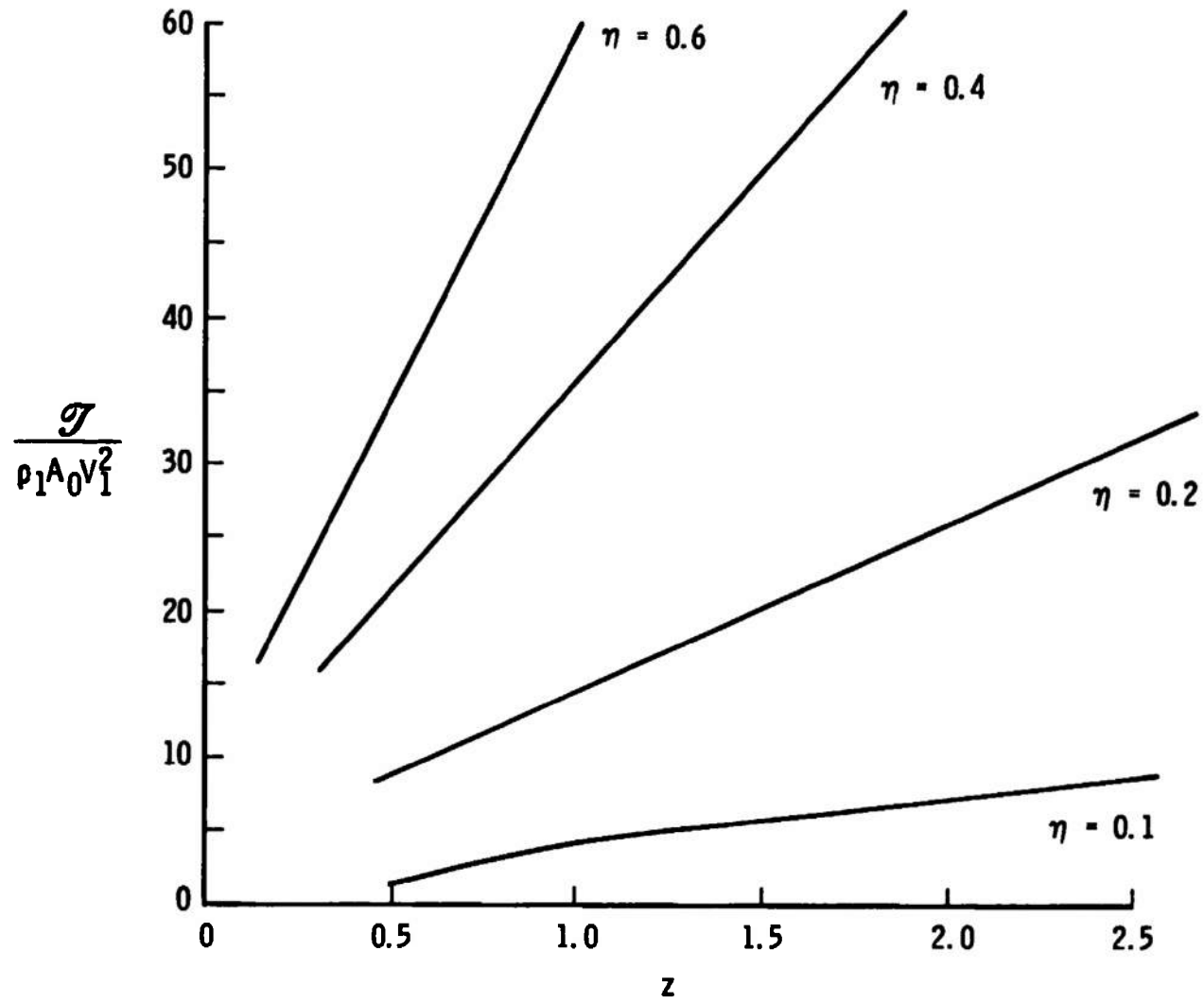


Fig. 5 Variation of Thrust Coefficient with  $z$  for Various Ion Rocket Efficiencies

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